

Seven Stages

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Summary:

Grief, although taking many forms, usually presents itself in the same general way. In seven stages.

1. Shock & Denial
2. Pain & Guilt
3. Anger
4. Depression
5. The Upward Turn
6. Reconstruction
7. Hope & Acceptance

1. Shock & Denial

Author's Note:

tw; Suicide, Alcoholism and Child Abuse

Today is a day like any other. There is nothing wrong with today. Not even the fact that it's raining. He woke up this morning, he got dressed and kept with his usual morning routine: Grab a Poptart, put on his mismatched socks, tie his shoes and leave. No, there is nothing wrong with today.

That's what Richie tells himself as he strides into Derry high school. He did as he usually would, not a change in his routine. It wasn't uncommon for him to not see any of his friends until lunch, he didn't have classes with any of them, considering he was the only one in AP classes.

The first hiccup in his day: Focusing proves rather difficult as he sits in pre-calc. Everything his teacher says goes in one ear and out the other. His focus keeps falling away from the lesson, and his gaze falls to look out the window. He zones out there, losing track of time until the bell signalling the end of the period goes off.

It's time for lunch, which is when the second hiccup occurs. Richie's friends all know today is not like any other day. All of them know things are bad right now, and none of them can figure out why Richie sits down for lunch and acts as though nothing is wrong.

Things are very wrong.

But no one says anything because Richie won't say anything. They're all hyper-aware of the fact that less than two days ago, Richie's father had taken his own life in his study. No one will mention it. How do you mention it? They all share looks between one another while Richie nonchalantly eats his lunch.

Eddie walks him home that day, and even still he doesn't say anything, but his heart breaks a little bit when he watches Richie part to walk into his house. He must be lonely, Eddie thinks. It's just him and his mom, now; Not that his dad did much for that anyway. But now, he had to manage his alcoholic mother on his own, on top of dealing with the death of his father. However, it seems like Richie's decided to entirely ignore the latter.

Eddie wants to help, but he's not sure how to, especially not because Richie's giving off the vibe he doesn't want help - or maybe he just thinks he doesn't need it.

Richie's home is hell on earth. He envies his dad. He'd give anything to be in real hell, instead of his own damn house. He walks through the door, his mother - who is sober for the first time in a very long time - jabs a finger at him. Demands to know where he's been.

"At school." He tells her as he turns to retreat to his room.

She yells at him, her voice fades though as he enters his room, slamming the door behind him. Why does she choose now to turn a new page in her alcoholism? When all Richie wants is for things to be *normal*, she chooses to shake things up even more.

It occurs to Richie then just how shitty his perception of normal is. What is normal to Richie Tozier? Normal is never having food on the table. Normal is entering his home to his mother passed out on the couch, an almost empty tumbler of whiskey in her hand. Normal is the sharp sting of his father's hand making contact with his face. Normal is slamming doors, yelling and sneaking out his bedroom window.

He wants normal, longs for it even. All he wanted was to have entered his house to his mother passed out in the living room, his father yelling from his study. He'd go to his room, making sure to slam the door to let everyone in the house know how much he hates it here. He'd be rewarded for that with no dinner.

But unfortunately, that sense of sick normalcy is ripped away from him along with his selfish father. Even in his death, he had to make shit as terrible for Richie as he could. Like he always had. Richie shouldn't be surprised.

Richie didn't have time to deal with any of this. He'd spent the past day and a half ignoring it. He went to the quarry the day of his father's death and acted as though nothing had happened. And all of his friends bought into it, no one was none the wiser. That is until they went home and saw his father's death broadcasted on the news. Some of them tried to call him, but he hadn't answered.

A knock comes at his bedroom door.

"Richie, please, open up." It's his mother. "I just want to talk."

Richie drowns her out with his favourite mixtape, played over the headset of his walkman. The tape is an hour and thirty-seven minutes long, and Richie listens to it twice before he takes the headset off to silence. He opens his door hesitantly. As he pads downstairs, he's pleasantly surprised with the gift of partial normalcy; His mother in her usual place, passed out, drink in hand. He walks past her, into the kitchen to retrieve a Poptart, then retreats to his room.

He goes to school again the next day, and he can feel everyone's eyes on him. He can feel them as if they're bugs under his skin, making his flesh crawl. Richie was used to going unnoticed by most until he *made* them notice him. He liked that. He liked that he was able to stay out of people's eyelines unless he wanted to be in them. But not now. Now he was the centre of attention, and God, he hated it.

Things were becoming less and less normal at a rate Richie didn't know how to manage. In class, the teachers didn't tell him to pay attention when he zoned out. People were *sympathetic* and if there was anything Richie hated more than his own father, it was pity.

And so he leaves early - which is normal for Richie. But usually it's because he's skipping with his friends, or he's leaving on a whim. But today, he leaves because he can't handle being there.

His mother is drunk, and Richie silently thanks his lucky stars for it as he locks himself away in his room, trying to drown out his own thoughts with his mixtape.

Then comes the funeral. It's a Tuesday. Richie feels numb the entire trip to the church where they're holding the open casket viewing. He doesn't know *why* they're having an open casket, considering his dad shot himself in the head. He hadn't seen his father when the people

from the morgue came to take him.

Entering the church, things seemed to slow, almost like the world around him had stopped happening for a moment. People in the pews began to fade away until it was just him and his father. His feet carried him to the casket as if they had a mind of their own. And there he stands, in front of his father, who looks unscathed. If Richie didn't know any better, he'd think he was asleep.

“Fuck you.” Richie mutters under his breath. “You fucking prick. You always find a way to out-do yourself.” He says.

Richie's relationship with his father was never good. From a young age, even, they'd never gotten along - at least that's how it started. As a kid, it was purely him struggling to relate to his father, and vice versa; They never saw eye to eye. But when his mother's drinking began to spiral, their inability to sustain a functioning relationship became more volatile. Richie's mother's drinking put stress on his parent's relationship, which put stress on his father, which turned into his father violently lashing out at Richie. Whether it be emotional abuse, mental abuse or - less common, but still prevalent - physical abuse. Things always seemed to get worse as Richie got older.

“You're such a selfish asshole.” Richie says softly, his voice warbling. Without a thought, Richie's fist comes down on the wall of the casket. “Things were *already* a mess with you, and now you just made it even more of a fucking disaster, and *I* have to clean it up!” He sobs loudly.

Richie hadn't noticed that he'd been gradually raising his voice to the point where he'd yelled. The church fell silent as they sheepishly watched Maggie Tozier approach her son. She tries to rest a

comforting hand on Richie's shoulder, but he jerks away from her and rushes out the side entrance of the church.

Out in the alley adjacent to the church, Richie sits on the ground, back against the brick wall of the building. He can't even manage to steady his breathing as he struggles to get himself under control. He's crying, letting out strangled sobs intermingled with ragged breaths. He wishes he had brought his cigarettes.

The door pushes open next to him, and Richie immediately shields his face, embarrassed.

“Richie?” It’s Beverly Marsh.

It hadn’t occurred to him that his friends would’ve come to his dad’s funeral.

Richie doesn’t say anything, but Beverly crouches in front of him, resting her hands on his knees, in her left hand is a pack of cigarettes.

“Want a smoke?” She asks softly.

He nods because he knows opening his mouth will just allow his mind room to let out cries.

Beverly hands him a cigarette and lights it for him after he closes his mouth around it. Beverly lights her own and sits next to Richie. She

hesitantly puts an arm over his shoulders, and he lets her drag him closer, his head falling to her shoulder.

“He was an asshole.” Richie mutters.

Beverly nods in agreement. “Yes, he was.”

A shaky inhale, and he says, “Then why does it hurt so *bad* .”

2. Pain & Guilt

Summary for the Chapter:

The most disgruntling about Richie's episodes were that they were loud. Loud enough that his neighbours could probably hear him shriek in the night. Certainly loud enough that his mother who slept just downstairs could hear. But she never came, never so much as knocked on his door. She didn't know Eddie was sleeping the nights; As far as Maggie Tozier knew, she was leaving her 16 year old son to scream into the empty night on his own.

Notes for the Chapter:

tw; Abuse

It's been two weeks since Wentworth Tozier's funeral, and the only two people who've seen Richie at all since then have been Beverly and Eddie. Beverly takes him out for walks so they can share a pack of cigarettes. The walks are mostly silent, as Richie's not much for conversation lately. Richie sneaks Eddie into his room at night because he can't seem to sleep anymore, and he likes the company.

Though because of that, Eddie sees parts of Richie he never knew existed. They're parts that not even Richie knew existed until about two weeks ago. Parts that contained sorrow, vulnerability and soul shattering hurt.

They manifested in his sleep. At least four times now, Eddie's jolted out of his sleep by strangled half screams, half sobs coming from Richie. The first time it happened, Eddie scrambled to try and wake Richie out of his sleep, sitting up and grabbing his shoulders. He shook him, but a hard yelp came out in response. Eddie could feel his own lungs struggling to keep up with the pace of the situation. He lurched forward and cupped Richie's face.

“Richie!” He frantically cried.

Richie tried to break away from Eddie's grip, thrashing wildly until Eddie enveloped his body in his own arms.

After the first time, he knew better. He began to pull Richie closer, trying to wrap his arms around Richie's convulsing body. After about thirty seconds, he'd relax, instinctively burying his face into Eddie's chest, his breathing coming to a low hull.

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Richie describes his episodes as nightmares. Well - nightmare. It's the same dream, over and over, every night. The nights he sleeps, anyway. He explains that to Richie as they sit in Richie's bedroom. It's Saturday, so Eddie can stay for as long as Richie needs - which is all day.

"What happens in it?" Eddie asks hesitantly, sitting next to Richie on his bed.

Richie tongues the inside of his mouth. His hands fiddle uncomfortably in his lap, his eyes on the floor.

"You - you don't have to tell me." Eddie quickly adds.

"It's about that night." Richie says, his voice so quiet Eddie almost doesn't hear it. "I - we're in his study. He's telling me why - why he..." Richie's voice gets caught in his throat.

Eddie reaches out, touching his clasped hands reassuringly. Richie looks up, and feels some minuscule sense of comfort in response to Eddie's soft, concerned expression. Though the comfort fades about as quickly as it had started when he tries to speak again.

"He says it's my fault. I make mom drink, and I drive him crazy." He's practically whimpering, his voice feels so small. "Th-then he -"

It's like his mouth won't let him say it. "He shoots me, and then he shoots himself." And with that Richie chokes on a sob, his body lurching forward.

"Oh, Richie." Eddie sighs, squeezing his hand around Richie's.

"I feel it. It's like I've been shot. It hurts so much, Eddie. I can feel my chest ache." Richie sobs. Eddie immediately pulls him into his chest. "It's my fault." Richie cries. "It's my fault." He repeats.

"No, Richie, don't say that." Eddie says gently. "It's not your fault. None of this is your fault."

He knew Richie wouldn't believe it, not for a long time.

After a while, Richie seems to have calmed down, but he stays leant again Eddie's chest, not wanting that contact to stop. Eddie rubs gentle circles into Richie's shoulder.

"You know, I thought I wanted him dead." Richie mumbles.

Eddie's heart twinges.

"Thought it'd make my life easier. And I guess it kind of does, but it also kind of fucked up a whole other set of things." Richie mumbles. "Like at least my dad can't smack me around anymore. But if I thought my mom was bad before, it's going to be so much worse now. And I wanted it. So I guess that's my fault."

"Richie," Eddie combs a hand through Richie's hair, trying his best to keep him relaxed. "It isn't your fault."

"No, Eddie, it is." Richie sits up, and Eddie detangles his hand from Richie's hair as he begins to move away. "It is my fault. I used to like hope that he'd just drop dead. Isn't that fucked up?" Richie laughs, and it sounds so broken. "He was a total piece of shit, but in some way I guess he was holding shit together."

"Don't give him credit. He was a piece of shit, like you said." Eddie says, memories of Richie crawling through his bedroom window at night because he was afraid of being in his own house come flooding into Eddie's mind.

Everyone who knew Richie's dad knew he was awful. All his friends, even some of their parents. They all knew it. It was plain as day that he was an awful father, if they could even consider him a father to begin with. When Richie was younger, like 10, he was afraid of his dad. He'd look for excuses to stay out, stay away from home. As he grew up, he got colder. He'd show up to Eddie's bedroom at one in the morning, new bruises on his arm, sometimes a black eye. And he acted as though he didn't even care, like it was just a part of life. Because to Richie, it was a part of life.

"It's true, though." Richie says, shifting to sit criss-cross. "Sure, it fucking sucked around here, but like...it was normal at least."

"Rich, your dad hitting you - for literally any reason - isn't normal." He says, shifting to look at Richie, whose gaze is far away somewhere.

Richie tilts his head, mulling that thought over in his head. "What if I deserved it, though?"

"You didn't." Eddie says, a matter of factly.

Eddie reaches out and cups Richie's face, pulling his head down onto his shoulder, and he wraps his arms around his shoulders. Richie cries and Eddie holds him, because part of him is scared that if he lets go, he'll break.

3. Anger

Summary for the Chapter:

What a stupid question, Richie thinks. How are you?

How do you think? On average Richie gets three hours of sleep a night. He can't sleep unless my best friend is in his bed with him to begin with. He leave this hell hole to go to his own personal hell hole, where his living parent emulates death at the hand of whiskey. In the nights where Eddie doesn't sleep with him, he sits in silence. But it's not silent, because in his ears ring the gun shot he heard a month ago from the study. Over and over, he hears it, and sometimes he even feels it. A gaping hole forms in his chest, and he's not even sure what caused it. Like everyone, including himself, always said: His father was shit. Garbage with a sharp backhand. Why was there a hole in his chest?

There was a vague memory of Richie still clinging to who he was a month after his father's death. He was still Richie, but only a little bit. There was an air of bitterness to him that came out in ways that left a bad taste in the mouths of his friends. Though they understood. He was hurting still. So, they took it. They let Richie lash out, and they took it in stride. It was all apart of the process.

In the mornings, the sun would dance on the other side of Richie's eyelids and he would try to squeeze his eyes shut tighter, trying to shut the door on the day. He wanted to sleep - better yet, he never wanted to wake up. His blood runs hot as he sits up in his bed; How dare the world make him face the day? Didn't it know he was broken?

For a moment, there's a wave of gentility as he looks over to see Eddie asleep still at his side. He wants to lie back down, press closer to his friend and try to absorb everything in Eddie that Richie had lost in himself; The gentility, the kindness, the tenderness. Richie had lost those.

He nudges Eddie with his elbow, trying his best to be gentle. Though, as of late, Eddie's become a rather light sleeper, hyperaware of most any move Richie makes when they sleep. So a nudge wakes him almost immediately.

He rolls to his back and rubs his eyes. "Richie?" He mumbles. "Is everything okay?" He asks.

"Yea," Richie responds. "You're going to be late for school if you don't leave soon."

"Are you going to come today?" Eddie asks, like he does every day.

Richie decides he'll try today. And he does. He makes it through that quiet walk to school, he makes it through study hall, and his first two periods. He even makes it to lunch, but lunch is where things usually fall apart.

As of late, Richie cannot stand his friends, although they don't really feel like friends right now. They all look at him with sad, sympathetic eyes. No one will address him, or talk to him unless it's asking how he is.

What a stupid question, Richie thinks. *How are you ?*

How do you think? On average Richie gets three hours of sleep a night. He can't sleep unless his best friend is in his bed with him to begin with. He leave this hell hole to go to his own personal hell hole, where his living parent emulates death at the hand of whiskey. In the nights where Eddie doesn't sleep with him, he sits in silence. But it's not silent, because in his ears ring the gun shot he heard a month ago from the study. Over and over, he hears it, and sometimes he even feels it. A gaping hole forms in his chest, and he's not even sure what caused it. Like everyone, including himself, always said. His father was shit. Garbage with a sharp backhand. Why was there a hole in his chest?

Of course, he doesn't say any of that. He shrugs, usually, which just earns more sympathetic looks. People the likes of Henry Bowers won't even glare in his direction. How sad is that? Richie's become too pathetic tot even get the shit beat out of him by the Bowers Gang. Richie never thought he'd miss the familiar feeling of bones pounding against his flesh, creating bruises and marks.

But here he was, almost yearning for it. He wanted to feel it, to feel anything. Richie's not even sure he remembers physical pain.

It's a blur aftter Henry enters the cafeteria. His friends watch, almost horrified as they watch Richie stand up and trail behind Henry before shoving him from behind. It almost happens in slow motion, Richie's hands meet Henry's back, and in a matter of seconds, Henry's on the ground. And not at any given point does Richie regret his actions; Not even when Henry's fist comes into contact with the left side of his jaw.

For about ten seconds, Henry drives his fists against Richie's face, and Richie takes it, lying on his back with Henry straddling his limp body. He's quickly yanked off by a teacher, and Beverly is the first person to kneel next to Richie.

"What the fuck was that, Tozier?!" She demands.

Richie looks up at her, she's knelt over him. She looks a bit like a fiery haired angel as she grimaces at him, waiting for a response. But he doesn't have one. Not a good one, anyway.

Richie hated the feeling of being pathetic, and that's the only way anyone saw him.

Suddenly Richie's being yanked to his feet, and his head spins as he shifts. His legs feel as though they've been disconnected. He blinks a few times, trying to gain a bearing on himself. His vision shifts down and he spots Eddie, who's angrily glaring up at him as he clutches Richie's forearms.

"You're a fucking moron." Eddie tells him.

Eddie walks Richie all the way back to his house.

"What about your mom?" Richie asks, his words coming out slow as molasses.

“It’s one in the afternoon, she’s at work. Stop talking.” Eddie orders.

Richie is sat in Eddie’s bathroom, and Eddie begrudgingly begins wiping blood off of Richie’s face.

“What were you thinking?” Eddie asks after a moment of painful silence.

“I wasn’t.” Richie answers because it’s easy to say that over ‘I miss being hit and I’m tired of everyone - including Henry Bowers - looking at me like I’m broken’.

Except he is broken. In every way imagineable, Richie is broken. And he know it too, and he hates it. It makes his blood burn and his vision clouds with red haze. Anger seems to be Richie’s default emotion. Bitter anger.

“You were thinking. You didn’t just midlessly decide to get your ass kicked.” Eddie knows him too well. “So what were you thinking?” He presses.

Richie winses as Eddie begins dabbing his skin with alcohol.

“You wouldn’t understand.” Richie grumbles.

“You know you aren’t the only one with a dead dad.” Eddie reminds him, an undertone of spite to his tone.

“It’s not the same thing.”

“Yes it is.” Eddie argues.

“No, Eddie, it’s not.” Richie bites back. “It’s *not* the same thing. Your dad, good old Mr. Kaspbrak, was taken out by the Big C, and your mommy took care of you and you were so young that no one ever knew what was going on. My dad was taken out by *himself*. And now everyone fucking looks at me like I need to be coddled.” Richie sneers. He jerks away from Eddie. “Henry Bowers wouldn’t even spit in my fucking direction, do you know what that feels like?”

“I can’t imagine it’d feel *bad*.” Eddie responds, confused.

“You’re so fucking naive.” Richie responds coldly.

It hurt Eddie’s feelings, all of it did, but he gets it. Richie’s angry. That’s fine. He can endure that anger.

“Then enlighten me.” Eddie responds, keeping his tone gentle.

“I’m not even worth getting the shit kicked out of me, I’m so pathetic. First I’m invisible at home, and then I’m invisible at school. Sure, I got the snot kicked out of me every other week, but at least someone was *noticing* me.” Richie says, his voice gradually growing in volume. “It’s not enough that I don’t have parents, but now I’m so pathetic I

can't even get decked at school? It's bullshit."

"You have a mom, Richie."

Richie scoffs. "As if Maggie counts as a mom." Richie sneers. "I will *not* go unnoticed." Richie states plainly, looking directly up at Eddie.

And Eddie nods. "I notice you." He says softly.

Richie rolls his eyes, but the small part of him that still has the capacity to feel hears it and forces a small smile onto his mouth.

4. Depression

Summary for the Chapter:

Richie's body has become a laying ground for his own tired bones, his mouth a chasm where the words he can't say go to die. Sometimes he wishes the world would crack open and swallow him up. Anything is better than the unbearable emptiness he feels.

Notes for the Chapter:

two chapters in one day?! (i was rlly excited about this one)

Richie is lost. No one has seen him for weeks now - maybe even months. Well, not really *lost* . His face shows itself at lunch period, and his body is present in the school building; But it's not Richie, not really.

It's almost as if when his dad left he took Richie with him. Dragging him into the depths of hell, as if to say *you're not getting away that easy* . It's like Richie's become a spectator of his own life, not in control of any aspect of himself or his life.

The nights he's alone, he goes for walks because his own mind holds him hostage, leaving him unable to sleep. So he walks. He thinks of whether or not his mother ever hears him leave and wonders where he's going, because he does; He wonders where his tired legs are taking his hollow body. Sometimes it's nowhere, but usually, it's to the doors of his friends' homes. He never knocks. Sometimes, though rare, it's to his father's grave where he collapses and screams for what feels like hours.

Richie's body has become a laying ground for his own tired bones, his mouth a chasm where the words he can't say go to die. Sometimes he wishes the world would crack open and swallow him up. Anything is better than the unbearable emptiness he feels.

He's drowning. Drowning in what feels like an endless abyss of nothing, with no glimmer of hope to cling to. What's worse is the deafening guilt he feels for not feeling at all. There's no reason for him to be drowning. His father did not hold this big of a part in his life to leave a whole this gaping.

On the nights he walks, and returns to his home, he thinks for moments at a time that maybe he's tired. His brain fools him, as it drudges, begging to be laid to rest, but as Richie puts his head to his pillow his mind howls a laugh at him, mocking him for falling for the same trick over and over. On these nights he calls Eddie on his personal line.

All he says is *sorry* , and within 20 minutes, Eddie is in Richie's bedroom, pulling him into bed. Richie tells him he's sorry, except he's not apologizing for anything in particular; Just anything and everything. And Eddie tells him that it's okay, there's no place for guilt here.

Richie thinks it's probably unhealthy that he can only perform basic human survival tasks like eating and sleeping when he can sense the familiar presence of Eddie. *It is* , Eddie tells him.

“But so is not eating or sleeping.” He says. “So we'll tackle one unhealthy coping mechanism at a time.”

For whatever reason, the only place Richie can feel home is in Eddie. For Eddie knows Richie as if he were a song Eddie had composed himself. He knows the melodies of Richie's cries, the pitch of his screams and the rate of his heartbeat.

So Richie lets himself melt into Eddie. Eddie can feel Richie's already weak heartbeat thrumming against his rib cage, rattling against Eddie's own chest. And he thinks that nothing will ever break his heart as much as Richie's barely there heartbeat.

Once, at lunch in Richie's absence, Ben says he misses Richie. The *real* Richie. Beverly scoffs.

"He still *here* , Ben." She scolds.

"No, he's not." Eddie says.

Beverly, taken aback, eyes Eddie. For the better part of half a year, Eddie's been sleeping in Richie's bed and for the past while, he falls asleep next to a familiar body that encases an unfamiliar soul; If any soul at all. And he awakes, fearful of how much further Richie's soul has drifted. He prays that his favourite soul returns to his favourite body. He misses it so much - he misses *Richie* so much. They all do. But not like Eddie does.

As Richie lays asleep, pressed up against Eddie, he thinks he can almost hear Richie's heart crack each time it throttles against his sternum. And along with it, Eddie's heart aches. He reaches into Richie's hair, breathes in his scent and tries to remember the person Richie once was. The person Eddie Kaspbrak fell in love with years

ago.

He's not gone, Eddie has to remind himself, just a little lost.

In his dreams, Richie meets with his father. It's not uncommon, but the way they meet is ever changing. In the first weeks, it was in the study, where his father would put a bullet in both of them. After that, it was over his casket, almost like a flashback of the funeral. Now he sits, and he asks all the questions he couldn't when he was alive.

Why? Was it my fault? Did you feel bad leaving mom and I? Did you even think about us? About me? Did you think I was a mistake? Is that why you hit me? Why did you hit me? Did you care about me? Did you ever even love me?

When he wakes up, he doesn't remember the answers. That doesn't stop him from waking up, his eyes burning with hot tears. Eddie wakes up immediately, quickly drawing Richie into himself. He combs soothingly through Richie's hair and whispers calm, soft words into Richie's ear, trying to lull him back to sleep.

How many times will his tears soak through Eddie's shirt, Richie wonders as they lay wordlessly in his bed. How many times will Eddie answer Richie's calls before he gets sick of him? How many times will he have to apologize as Eddie crawls through his bedroom window, a gentle smile on his face. He hopes as many times as he needs to until he feels like he's fixed, but he can't help but feel that it's selfish to hope that.

But Eddie's selfish too. Sure, 95% of the reason he lets Richie cry

through his shirts, or he answers his calls, or he climbs through Richie's window is because he knows Richie needs him, but 5% of it is because he's never seen a more vulnerable version of Richie, and while it's not him, he revels in being not only wanted but needed by him.

It's late afternoon when Richie properly wakes up, and Eddie's gone. It is a school day, after all, but Richie can't shake the crippling loneliness he feels without him. It's in moments like this where he wonders what it would be like if he'd met the same fate as his father. But they fade the minute Eddie is back in his space.

5. The Upward Turn

Summary for the Chapter:

“I-It’ll suck for a long t-time. And that’s okay, but w-we all support y-you.” Bill says, tentatively slinging his arm over Richie’s shoulder and pulling him to lean into him. Bill takes a deep breath, trying to make sure he gets this all in one go, and says: “We love you, Richie.”

And there it is, that’s what he feels. Twinges of love. He loves Beverly as she holds him, he loves Bill as his arm slings around himself, and Richie has always loved Eddie.

It’s as if they’re seeing a ghost, only it’s a 17 year old boy. A 17 year old boy they hadn’t properly seen for months. As he comes walking into Bill’s living room with Eddie, their friends try their best not to make a big deal out of the fact that Richie looks like himself. Well, kind of. He’s definitely showered, he’s wearing clean clothing. He looks even better than he normally would. Though, they know it’s not all Richie. He’s still quiet, doesn’t talk much, doesn’t express much; But it’s a start that he came to Bill’s house in the first place.

Eddie had convinced Richie. *You need to get out*, Eddie insisted after a solid 2 weeks of Richie not leaving his room for any reason other than going to the bathroom. Richie rolled his eyes. He was fine, he had no problem rotting away in his bedroom.

“Richie you can’t just shut yourself away.”

“Sure I can, Eddie, I’ve been doing it for months.” Richie reminds him plainly.

“Isn’t it enough that you spent your 17th birthday in here, only awake for like 3 hours of the day?” Eddie folds his arms over his chest.

“What’s it matter, anyway?” Richie mutters, sitting up in his bed to look at Eddie who’s stood in his bedroom doorway.

“They miss you Richie, all of them. Bev, Ben, Mike, Bill and Stan. Fuck, Rich, *i* miss you and I’m practically *living* with you.” Eddie says, throwing his hands up. “Just give them a *night* .”

Richie stares at Eddie for a long while, confused. How could Eddie miss him when he - as he said - practically lives with him. “What?” He whispers.

“I miss you. I miss *you* . I miss trashmouth.” Eddie says, choking on the last word. “Just please, for one night, come out.” He says, drawing closer to Richie’s bed.

And with that Richie agrees, and here he stands in Bill Denbrough’s living room. Immediately, Beverly stands, skipping to him and throws her arms around Richie’s neck, pulling him to her. Instinctively, Richie wraps his arms around Beverly’s waist, but something clicks in his head and he quickly tightens his grip and drops his head to her shoulder.

Beverly holds Richie the same way she held him at his father’s funeral: As if she were holding a broken vase together.

When they pull back, Beverly wipes the stray tear on Richie's cheek, and he does the same.

"Good to see you, Tozier." Beverly grins.

"Back at you, Marsh."

Richie doesn't pay much attention to the movie; He can't really keep focused on it. Instead he focuses on his long arm that's draped over Eddie's shoulder. He also focuses on the burning in his chest, indicating he could go for a smoke. So once the movie ends, Richie tells his friends he needs a moment and sits on Bill's back porch to light up.

He only gets a few moments to himself before Bill steps out onto the porch and sits next to him on the step. You could cut through the tension with a knife.

"I'm glad y-you came tonight." Bill says gently.

Richie exhales, pushing smoke from his lungs. He doesn't respond, though, because he's not sure if he's glad he came right now. He's not having a bad time, but he's just not sure if it was worth leaving his fortress of solitude (his room).

"Y-you feel more like y-yourself, y-yet?"

“No.” Richie responds honestly. “No, I don’t. But I think I’m getting there.”

Bill nods.

“Hey, Bill?”

“Y-yea?”

“How did you not blame yourself, after...after Georgie?” Richie asks quietly, unsure of whether or not it’s insensitive to ask.

Bill sucks in a breath. Even years later, he doesn’t like talking about Georgie. “I did blame myself.” He answers. “For a l-long time I-I blamed myself.”

Richie nods.

“I-It’s not y-your fault, though, Richie.” Bill says, reaching out to touch Richie’s knee reassuringly.

“You know, people keep telling me that, but I’m not so sure about it.” Richie says and takes another drag from his cigarette.

“Y-your dad was-”

“Shit. I know. I know he was.” Richie says, the irritation clear. He’s tired of hearing it.

He knows his dad was terrible, he knew it when he was alive. He didn’t need people to spell it out, as if his father being awful makes losing him any less shitty. As if living life fatherless is preferable to living with a bad one; Though, neither options were preferable. It’s a lose lose situation, really.

“I-I’m sorry, Richie. Really, I am.” Bill says. “We’re all worried ab-b-
out you. We miss y-you.” Bill continues. “I kn-know that sounds
selfish, and all, b-but it’s t-true. And I know i-it sucks, what y-you’re
going through, b-but you don’t need to go through it al-lone.”

That makes Richie’s heart ache a little bit, though he’s not sure why. It’s not like it’s information he hadn’t known before this conversation.

“I miss you guys too.” Richie responds, only he doesn’t really. He doesn’t really feel anything for anyone, or anything at all for that matter.

Actually, that’s not all true. He’s starting to feel more - more than just emptiness. He felt something, although he’s not sure what, when Beverly hugged him. He felt something just now when Bill said they missed him. He feels something when he wakes up in the middle of the night, startled out of his sleep, and is immediately drawn into Eddie Kaspbrak’s chest. He feels. Usually he feels empty, but sometimes he likes to spice it up.

“I-It’ll suck for a long t-time. And that’s okay, but w-we all support y-you.” Bill says, tentatively slinging his arm over Richie’s shoulder and pulling him to lean into him. Bill takes a deep breath, trying to make sure he gets this all in one go, and says: “We love you, Richie.”

And there it is, that’s what he feels. Twinges of love. He loves Beverly as she holds him, he loves Bill as his arm slings around himself, and Richie has always loved Eddie.

“Love you too, Big Bill.” Richie says, gently nudging the side of Bill’s head with his own.

That night, after they movie, Eddie walks Richie home.

“Am I staying the night?” Eddie asks, which is a common question for him now.

“Yea.” Richie says, with no hesitation.

Richie doesn’t really think he needs Eddie tonight. Albeit rare, there are nights where Richie doesn’t feel like Eddie needs to stay, he feels genuine exhaustion. And every time that’s happened, Richie sends Eddie home, to sleep in his own bed. But tonight Richie’s feeling extra selfish, so he tells him to stay.

As Richie sits in bed, watching Eddie change into the pyjamas he

leaves in Richie's dresser, he opens his mouth to speak.

"Thank you for making me go tonight."

Eddie nods. "Thank you for going."

"I -" Richie's not even sure what he wants to say, he just feels words sitting in his mouth. "I want to feel myself again." He says.

Eddie nods again, slower this time. "That'd be nice." He mulls.

"I just...I don't know how."

"You have help." Eddie says.

"I know."

Notes for the Chapter:

im kind of writing this as a no pennywise au, so just assume that Georgie died.....inexplicably.....somehow.....

6. Reconstruction

Summary for the Chapter:

There's a long bout of silence, and both of them want to say a hundred different things. Eddie wants to tell him everything he tells his reflection about how he feels. He wants to tell Richie that even though his heart's been broken one hundred times while supporting him since his dad's death, he would let it break one hundred more if it meant being close to him. Richie wants to tell Eddie that he doesn't think he'll ever be able to repay him for being here for him, but he wants to try. He wants to tell him that he's been in love with him since he was 13 and he's never been more afraid of something in his life.

Richie's tired of being afraid though, all his fear came from someone who's not around to scare him anymore. There's no reason to be scared.

There's a new page turning, but it feels like the page weighs of a thousand bricks, and Richie's struggling to turn it. On the backside of the page, stories and memoirs of pain, loss, and secrets. A lack of trust in Richie's self and the people around him. He swallows down parts of himself he felt he had to protect from his father and buried them deep inside him. Richie was so used to internalizing the most honest aspects of himself. Nobody - sometimes not even himself - knew who he was. The other side of the page, though, was determined to be better.

It was a school day, and Richie overslept. Eddie was gone, but left a note on the pillow next to Richie's.

I'll be back after school, and I'll bring food. - Eds

Richie grins at that.

Sitting up in his bed, Richie blinks at the wall across from him. It's blank. He should hang something there, he thinks. He should do a lot of things. For starters, he should shower. He stands and drags himself into the bathroom where he showers, rinsing the past two days from his skin. He stands under the shower head, letting the water envelope him in warmth. He stays for longer than he needs to before stepping out and sitting on the edge of the tub for a moment.

Maybe he should eat. It's early, and he has a long time before Eddie comes back with food. And knowing Eddie, he'd probably be upset if he came back and Richie hadn't eaten. So he pads downstairs and into the kitchen where he scrounges for food - he realizes now that he's relied on Eddie to bring him leftovers from his home, or takeout. He finds a granola bar and decides it'll tide him over.

As he walks out of the kitchen, his mother's arm flops over the back of the couch. "Richie?" She hums. She's not as drunk as usual.

Richie stops and stares at her outstretched hand. Over the past half year - give or take - since his dad offed himself, him and his mother have barely spoken. Maybe that's something else he should do; Talk to his mom. She's all he's got, after all.

He takes her hand and peers over the back of the couch to look at her. She's looking up at him.

“Richie, sit with me. Talk to me.” She says, only it’s not a question.

But Richie sits. His mother is curled up in the corner of the couch, her shaggy, unkept hair swept behind her ears. Her face is sad. Richie had always favoured his mother in looks, which he preferred.

There’s a long moment of silence before Maggie Tozier says, “I wish you looked more like your father.”

Richie sucks in a sharp breath through his nose.

Maggie quickly shakes her head, knowing that was the wrong thing to say. She looks up at her son, who’s looking at her now, slowly blinking. In her chest, she feels her heart ache. “I should have been there for you.” She tells him.

Richie nods. “Yea, you should’ve.” He mumbles.

Instinctively, Maggie jumps on defense. “Hey, I needed to grieve too Richie.” She snaps. “The world does not revolve around you. He was *my* husband before he was your father.” She says.

Richie sighs, drawing his hand away and goes to stand.

“Richie, wait. I - I’m sorry. I just -” Richie looks to her, and hesitantly sits back down. “I know I’m a bad mother. I know.”

“Do you know, Maggie?” Richie asks.

“Hey, watch it.” She scowls. “That’s not how you refer to me.”

“Mom is an earned title, Maggie, and like you just sad, you’re a bad mom. However, I’d disagree there.” Richie mutters. “You’re not really much of a mom at all.”

That one burns. She doesn’t say anything, she just looks down to her lap.

“Do you know dad hit me?” Richie asks. “Of course you know, you saw it happen. I’m just wondering if you remember that, considering you were drunk and let dad beat me almost every day. Do you remember that?”

This isn’t going to plan. He’d planned more of a reconciliation. Coming to a common ground, and working to fix - not fix, something needs to have existed for it to be fixed - to build a relationship. But he’s got a lot of pent up anger for Maggie. She left him.

“Did you hear me screaming? Every night for months, did you hear me screaming in the middle of the night?”

Tears begin to stream down Maggie’s face. “Yes.” Her voice is soft.

“Why didn’t you come?”

“I was scared.” She chokes on the words. “It broke my heart to hear it, really it did.”

“But not enough for you to check on me, right?” She’s quiet after that. He sighs quickly. “But don’t worry about it too much, because while you avoided your responsibilities as a mother, Eddie Kaspbrak has been staying the nights.”

Maggie smiles, for some reason. She’d always liked Eddie, thought he was good for Richie. All of Richie’s friends were good for him, but Eddie had a good head on his shoulder. Kept Richie in line. She could see that in her brief lapses of sobriety. Not only that, but she could very clearly sense something more between them. It was weird to her, sure, but she didn’t have the heart to keep Eddie out of her house, not when Eddie was more of a parent to Richie than her and her husband were.

“Do you like Eddie?” She asks.

Richie’s gaze snaps up. “What?”

Maggie raises an eyebrow. “Eddie, do you like him?”

“Of course, he’s my best friend.” Richie responds quickly.

She half smirks back. There's another long bout of silence before Maggie speaks again. "I'm going to try to do better." Maggie tells him.

Richie nods, although he puts little to no stock into what she says anymore. She seems earnest, but Richie's never been in the business of setting himself up to be disappointed.

Richie now sits in his room, a tape playing in the ghettoblaster as he stares at the ceiling. He's thinking, he's not sure what exactly he's thinking about, it's many things really. He hasn't done any thinking about much outside of his father for a while. As he lies there, he thinks of his mom; Will she do better, can he trust her to do that, or would trusting her be setting himself up for disappointment? If she does do better, what will happen? How do they form a relationship 17 years too late? Then he thinks about what she said about Eddie. His father disliked Eddie for the very reason his mother asked him about. He could feel it, he could feel the "more than friends" between Eddie and Richie. It earned Richie more beatings than he cared to remember. He swallowed that part of him, drowned it with fear so he didn't have to face his dad. But now, maybe he can let it resurface.

Tap Tap

A knock on the window indicates Eddie's arrival. Richie rolls out of bed and opens the window to Eddie, who proudly holds a McDonalds bag.

"Hi." Eddie grins.

A small smirk plays at the edge of Richie's mouth. "Hi." He responds.

Eddie climbs in, pushing past Richie to set the food on the desk by the door.

“How was school?” Richie asks.

“Long.” Eddie says as he lays the food out. “KInda missed you.” He says softer, looking over at Richie to eye his reaction.

“Missed you too,” Richie mumbles back. He can feel the familiar burn in his cheeks and his ears. “I talked to Maggie today.” He says quickly, trying to change the subject.

Eddie looks over at Richie fully now, who’s gaze is lost again. “You what?” Eddie says, even though he heard him the first time.

“I talked to Maggie. She was like...kind of sober I guess, and we talked.”

“What’d you talk about?” Eddie asks, sitting in Richie’s desk chair.

Richie sits on the floor against his bed and sighs. He wants to tell Eddie. Not about his mom, but about *him* . He knows it’s obvious, it’s obvious Eddie feels the same, but for every ounce of feeling Richie has for Eddie, there’s 5 ounces of fear Richie has of himself.

But he swallows it. He wants to move forward.

“About...you.” Richie says, almost too quiet to hear.

But Eddie hears it anyway, and his breath catches in his throat.

“Me?”

There's a long bout of silence, and both of them want to say a hundred different things. Eddie wants to tell him everything he tells his reflection about how he feels. He wants to tell Richie that even though his heart's been broken one hundred times while supporting him since his dad's death, he would let it break one hundred more if it meant being close to him. Richie wants to tell Eddie that he doesn't think he'll ever be able to repay him for being here for him, but he wants to try. He wants to tell him that he's been in love with him since he was 13 and he's never been more afraid of something in his life.

Richie's tired of being afraid though, all his fear came from someone who's not around to scare him anymore. There's no reason to be scared.

So he says it: “Thank you.” He says, feeling emotions starting to boil in his stomach.

Eddie furrows his brow, suddenly confused. “For what? The McDonalds?”

“No - no.” Richie chuckles and half grins at Eddie. “No, thank you for being....around, I guess.”

Eddie grins back. “You’re my best friend, Rich, of course.”

“Eddie.” Richie quickly says, trying to prompt himself to say what he really wants to.

“Yea?”

“I -” It gets caught in his throat. Like his body is trying to involuntarily drown the words before he says them.

But Eddie knows what’s coming. “I love you too, Richie.”

Richie’s eyes widen; Of course he knew Eddie did, but he’d be lying if he expected him to actually say it, and before him at that.

“But like, Eddie, I’m...I’m like *in love* with you.” Richie whispers.

Eddie’s grin turns into a full blown smile. “I’ve been waiting to hear that for a long time.” He says.

Something in Richie feels like it’s mending. His heart, maybe? Something that’s been broken for a long time starts to put itself back

together as Eddie steps across the room to kneel in front of Richie, and gently presses their lips together.

7. Hope & Acceptance

Summary for the Chapter:

Richie's not sure what's on the other side of the page, and he doesn't really care. Maybe there's nothing on the page, a blank canvas for Richie to write himself. He hopes so. If he could, he'd write about never thinking about his dad again, maybe he'd write that his mother never looks at another liquor bottle again, he'd write a million kisses into Eddie on the page.

Notes for the Chapter:

wow y'all this really it

Eddie's slept in Richie's bed more than he has his own it feels like at this point, but it's never felt quite like this. Eddie's asleep on his stomach, face buried in the pillow, while Richie's face is buried in Eddie's shoulder, arm thrown over his neck. It feel foreign, but right, Richie thinks.

Though there's still an underlying twinge of fear in Richie's chest, he the amount of comfort he feels overrides the fear. It's early, before seven am. So he lies there, pressing close to Eddie's unconscious warmth.

Part of Richie feels stupid, that all it took to fix him was admitting he loved someone. But that's not quite true. Richie spent months fixing himself, despite not knowing it. Sure, Eddie was there occasionally handing him tools, but if Richie didn't want to be fixed, he wouldn't be. He fixed himself when he woke up and showered without being told, when he went to school even when it felt impossible, when he agreed to go out with friends, when he confronted his mother. Richie was doing what he needed to, confronting everything that felt big and scary, things that looked like endless abysses, hoping to swallow him up.

Loving Eddie looked like an abyss to him, but lying in bed with him, it feels more like what he'd always needed to turn the page on his

life. As if he'd left everything that was drowning him on the other side with his father. There were still words of his father whispered onto this page too, and he thinks they'll probably be there forever, and he thinks maybe one day he'll be okay with that.

Richie's not sure what's on the other side of the page, and he doesn't really care. Maybe there's nothing on the page, a blank canvas for Richie to write himself. He hopes so. If he could, he'd write about never thinking about his dad again, maybe he'd write that his mother never looks at another liquor bottle again, he'd write a million kisses into Eddie on the page.

Eddie stirs then, feeling Richie's half ragged breaths on the back of his neck. He moves his head to look at Richie, and immediately his brows knit with concern.

"Richie?" Eddie mumbles. "What's wrong?"

Richie's brows knit back, but with confusion. "Nothing?" He mutters.

Eddie reaches up, rubbing his thumb under Richie's eye. "You're crying." Eddie states.

Richie hadn't realized it. He blinks a couple times and let's Eddie wipe the tears on cheeks before leaning in and kissing him slowly.

Eddie could get used to this, he thinks. Lazy kisses at 6am. He knows that some mornings at 6am, Richie will have heaving shoulders, awoken from a bad dream. He knows some mornings Richie won't want to wake up at all. He's okay with that now, because at least it feels like it's Richie, and not a soulless body.

It's felt more like Richie for a while, but the moment he kissed Richie, he could feel Richie soul under his skin. He could feel the familiarity pulsing against his lips, and he could hear Richie's heart; It was loud. Healthy, full, loud. Whole.

Eddie pulls away from Richie, who flashes a wide grin. It's then that Richie says the thing that makes everything feel right again, in the weirdest way possible: "Almost as good as your mom, Kaspbrak." He teases.

“Beep beep, Richie.” Eddie says against Richie’s lips, shutting him up with another kiss.

Notes for the Chapter:

it's short but it's just a nice little conclusion.